

I am writing to express my support for Bill 18-22 to phase out the sale and use of gas-powered leaf blowers in the county. I hope, despite the limited remaining time, that the Council can approve it before the end of the year.

These devices are a unique noise nuisance, with a sound profile that travels long distances and penetrates walls. They are a health hazard to the workers who use them, causing permanent hearing loss and exposing workers to benzene and other hazardous pollutants. They give off a disproportionate amount of greenhouse gases and have a readily available electric / battery alternative which is just as powerful and effective.

- As County Executive Elrich noted in his memo of March 15, proposing the legislation, “Research shows combustion engine-powered leaf blowers have specific low and mid-frequency noise qualities or tones that are highly penetrative and result in noise being two to four times louder than electric plug in or battery powered options at the unit and up to 400 feet away. The low frequency noise is particularly penetrative of non-heavy building materials and easily carries through windows and doors. Beyond being distracting, this noise can have adverse health effects, both auditory, such as hearing loss and tinnitus, systemic vascular disease and mental illness.”
- As the Office of Legislative Oversight noted in its Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement on the bill, Latinx residents are overrepresented in the landscaping workforce and likely experience the most direct health costs from operating leaf blowers. Since the beneficiaries of the leaf blowers are comparatively white and affluent, this raises issues of environmental justice.
- Eliminating these inefficient and polluting devices is consistent with the county’s Climate Work Plan for fiscal year 2022 and the broader Climate Action Plan. [One study](#) found that a two-stroke gasoline-powered leaf blower spewed out more pollution than a 6,200-pound Ford F-150 SVT Raptor pickup truck. It was said that “hydrocarbon emissions from a half-hour of yard work with the two-stroke leaf blower are about the same as a 3,900-mile drive from Texas to Alaska in a Raptor.”

Recognizing that there will be a cost to the transition, the bill authorizes a reimbursement program to give a partial credit to residents and businesses who trade in their gas-powered leaf blowers – and/or the Green Bank could offer low- or no-interest loans to assist small businesses in replacing their equipment. As this will be a one-time transition, the program could be made generous enough to avoid any economic hardship for small businesses. Offsetting the expense, one study found that electric leaf blowers cost less than one-third of the operations and maintenance costs over a five-year period as compared to its gasoline or combustion engine-powered alternatives.

Both [the District](#) and [Chevy Chase Village](#) have taken similar action, with no harmful results. One DC resident told us that the effects on neighborhood noise levels have been “miraculous.”

Recognizing that the bill needs to move through the committee process and return to the full Council in the few months remaining this year, I ask that you do whatever you can to expedite its passage.

Reid Detchon